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Sweet Corn and Tomatoes: Harbingers of Mid-Summer in Massachusetts

BOSTON – What summer barbeque would be complete without corn on the cob and garden fresh tomatoes? For a few weeks beginning each August, Massachusetts residents can get local varieties of both crops at farm stands, farmers' markets, and grocery stores across the Commonwealth.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, Native Americans were growing sweet corn when the Pilgrims arrived and introduced the crop to European settlers. With 500 growers producing 49.5 million pounds on 6,600 acres, Massachusetts now ranks 18th in the country in sweet corn production. The state's sweet corn crop is valued at $15.6 million.

One medium ear of corn provides 80 calories and three grams of fiber, as well as numerous vitamins and minerals. While sweet corn can be stored in the refrigerator with husks on until use, it should be consumed as soon as possible after picking for maximum sweetness – a good reason to purchase corn from one of the 111 farmers' markets or 414 roadside stands located throughout Massachusetts.

Tomatoes – which are technically fruits, not vegetables – have been commercially produced in the US since 1884. By buying directly from growers at stands or farmers' markets, consumers are guaranteed the tastiest tomatoes - ones that have been allowed to fully ripen on the vine. Lycopene, an antioxidant that fights chronic disease, is abundant in tomatoes, and increases when tomatoes are cooked.

For a listing of roadside stands and farmers' markets offering sweet corn and tomatoes this summer, visit www.mass.gov/massgrown.

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